

No Second Baby, No You, Only Divorce

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Scarlett told herself she didn't want to look-didn't need another knife twist to her chest-but old habits were hard to break. Her thumb tapped the screen before she could stop it.

The video was just a single photo, same as before-Vincent kneeling down in front of Sabrina, his head tilted like he was hanging on her every word. The caption read, "Had a few drinks, caught a chill, called you up...

and you showed up. This right here? This is perfect."

A sharp, sudden pain lanced through Scarlett's chest. If they were that in love-if they were so desperate to play "couple"-then fine. Let them have each other.

She was done fighting to be the "bigger person". All she wanted now was a divorce-her daughter, her fair share of the assets, and nothing more to do with the Stewarts.

She stuffed her phone into her pocket and pushed open the front door of the villa. Lily Turner, the nanny, looked up in surprise.

"Mrs. Stewart?" she said, setting down the dust cloth in her hand.

“Where’s Vanessa?” Scarlett asked, her voice tight with anticipation. It had been weeks since she’d held her daughter-too long, thanks to her training and Vincent’s endless excuses.

“Vanessa is upstairs, playing with her Barbie dolls,” Lily replied.

No sooner had the words left her mouth than Vanessa’s voice echoed from the second floor.

“Mom?”

Scarlett’s heart ached. She practically ran up the stairs, dropped to her knees, and pulled Vanessa into a tight hug, covering her daughter’s cheeks with kisses.

But when she pulled back, ready to gush about how much she’d missed her, she froze. Vanessa was wiping her face over and over, scrubbing at the spots where Scarlett had kissed her until her skin turned pink.

Scarlett’s throat tightened. The questions she’d planned to ask-Did you miss me? How’s school?-died on her lips.

She stared at Vanessa, her eyes stinging, a mix of hurt and confusion swirling in her chest.

Before she could find her voice, Vanessa bounced on her toes, suddenly eager. “Mom, you’re back just in time! I was gonna call you! I’m starting kindergarten soon, and I wanna go to Sunshine Kindergarten.” Her eyes lit up like she’d just talked about a trip to the toy store,

Scarlett frowned, confused-she’d never heard of Sunshine Kindergarten before-but she couldn’t bring herself to dampen Vanessa’s excitement. It was just kindergarten, after all. If it

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didn’t work out, they could switch later. “Okay, baby,” she said, forcing a smile. “Sunshine Kindergarten it is.”

Vanessa cheered, jumping into the air. “Thank you, Mom! You’re the best!”

Watching Vanessa’s grin, Scarlett hesitated. How could she ruin this moment by bringing up divorce? By asking if Vanessa wanted to live with her?

She reached down, her hand brushing her stomach-still flat, still a secret-and took a deep breath.

“Vanessa,” she said, her voice soft but serious, “do you want a little brother or sister?”

Vanessa’s excitement faded for a second. She twisted a strand of her hair, then nodded. “A little brother.”

Scarlett’s chest hurt. “But what if Mom’s scared?” she asked, her voice cracking. The amniotic embolism from Vanessa’s birth was years behind her, but the fear-of bleeding out, of leaving her daughter-still woke her up at night.

Vanessa looked at her like she didn’t understand. “Then Mom shouldn’t be so selfish,” she said, matter-of-fact. “You had me, didn’t you?”

It was like a punch to the gut. Scarlett stood there, her face going pale, frozen to the spot.

She’d spent four years up with Vanessa at 2 a.m., feeding her, rocking her, calming her nightmares. She’d skipped work events to watch her first steps, her first words. And now Vanessa was calling her selfish for being scared to risk her life again?

After a long, terrible silence, she managed to whisper, “Aren’t you scared of losing Mom?”

At this moment, she just wanted to know from Vanessa if there was still any love for her.

Vanessa rolled her eyes, already turning toward her bedroom. “Ugh, I’m gonna go to bed.” She ran into her room and slammed the door shut.

Scarlett stood at the top of the stairs, feeling like she’d turned to ice. Vanessa-her baby-had just brushed off her fear like it was nothing. Then, through the closed door, she heard Vanessa’s voice, bright and excited again.

“Sabrina! I can go to Sunshine Kindergarten now!” Vanessa gushed, like she was talking to a best friend. “After work, you can pick me up, so you won’t be tired anymore!”

Scarlett’s breath caught. Sabrina? Why is Vanessa talking to Sabrina?

“And Sabrina,” Vanessa continued, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, “don’t have a baby with Dad, okay? Mom said having babies is super dangerous-you bleed a lot and you

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might die. Let Mom have the little brother. She already had me, so she’s not scared.”

A pause, then Vanessa sighed. “I miss you. I wanna hear your stories and cuddle with you...”

Scarlett leaned against the wall, her legs giving out. So that was why Vanessa wanted Sunshine Kindergarten-because Sabrina worked nearby? That was why she’d brushed off Scarlett’s kisses, why she’d called her selfish? Because Sabrina had wormed her way into Vanessa’s life, into her heart, while Scarlett was busy working and trying to fix a marriage that was already dead.

She had faced the divorce with one final, unshakable certainty-her daughter would always be hers. The truth-that Vanessa had already sided with the stranger-felt like a betrayal all its

own.

All her sacrifices-her time, her love, her near-death experience-had been for nothing. No one cared. Not Vincent, not Amanda, not even her own daughter.

After a while, Scarlett dragged herself downstairs. Lily saw her ashen face and started to ask, “Mrs. Stewart, are you-”

“Just leave me be,” Scarlett said, waving her off.

As soon as she stepped outside, she pulled out her phone and called Vincent. It rang four times, then went to voicemail. She called again. And again.

Normally, she’d give up after two tries-too scared of annoying him-but tonight, she was desperate. She needed to talk to him. She needed to scream.

Finally, Vincent answered, his voice sharp with irritation. “I’m busy. What do you want—”

“I need to see you,” Scarlett cut him off, her voice cracking. She was practically yelling, all her composure gone. “Right now.”

Vincent sighed, annoyed. “Whatever this is, we can talk next month, when we meet.”

He hung up. The dial tone buzzed in her ear, loud and mocking. Scarlett stared at her phone, tears pricking her eyes, but she couldn’t cry.

This was Vincent-always shutting her out, always making her feel like her feelings didn’t matter.

Five years of this. Five years of being ignored, of being a ghost in her own marriage. She was done.

But she wasn't leaving without a fight-not for custody of Vanessa. Even if Vanessa was closer to Sabrina now, Scarlett had to try.

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She was Vanessa's mother. She'd given birth to her. She wasn't going to let Sabrina take that

away.

Just as she made up her mind, headlights flashed. A Rolls-Royce screeched to a stop at the gate. Scarlett looked over-there was Vincent in the driver's seat, and Sabrina in the passenger's, holding a bouquet of pink roses.

Their eyes met through the windshield. Silence hung between them. Once, she would've frozen, scared to make a scene. Now? She didn't care.

Vincent got out of the car, acting like he didn't even see her, and walked around to open Sabrina's door.

“Vincent, we need to talk.” Scarlett called out.

He ignored her, reaching for the door handle. Scarlett rushed over, slapping his hand away. “Vincent, you can sleep with whoever you want-fine. But Vanessa is my daughter. How dare you let some stranger turn her against me?”

Finally, he looked at her. He was taller than her, and he loomed over her, his voice cold as ice. “Sabrina’s a better mom than you’ll ever be.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, Vincent pushed her aside and pulled open the car door.

Scarlett stood there, stunned. It took her a long time to react, and only then did she catch a glimpse of the subtle implication in his words.

Did he really mean that? Did he want Vanessa to call Sabrina “Mom”?

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